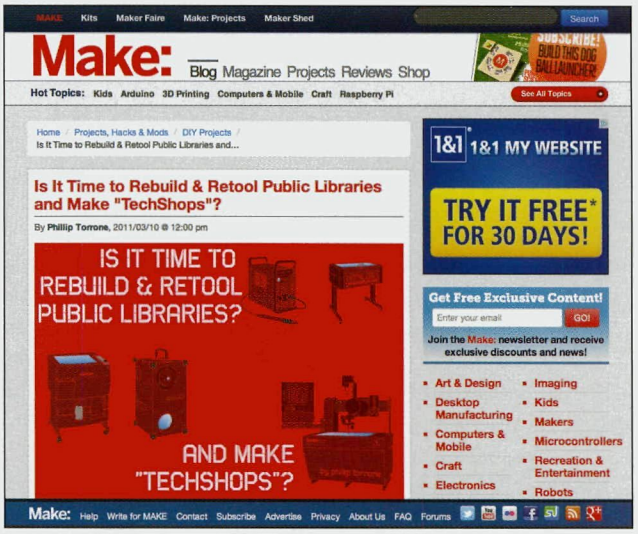
by janet l. balas

Do Makerspaces Add Value to Libraries?



The online magazine that spurred the maker movement

It is easy for a librarian to become indignant when the value of library services is questioned since we feel that our work has obvious value to the community. But to those who view libraries as a place to "look things up" or "borrow books," today's easy access to electronic resources appears to make the library unnecessary. We could make all the usual arguments about the value of libraries in a democracy, the problem of the digital divide, and so on, or we could demonstrate value through providing services that are a perfect match for the community. Yet, as librarians we must also understand that the library is evolving from being a place that houses materials to a place where users can work.

The nature of work being done in libraries is also changing. Libraries are not just places for the quiet study of scholarly materials, but they can also be places where the creation of audio or video presentations can take place. In the case of some extremely innovative libraries, they can also be places for making actual physical objects.

There is significant buzz surrounding "Maker Faires" and "makerspaces," also known as "hackerspaces," with libraries at the forefront, helping to bring the maker concept to their communities. Here are some key resources to inform you about this trend so you can evaluate how it could provide value to your patrons while fulfilling your library's mission.

Maker Faires and Hackerspaces Defined

Wikipedia defines Maker Faire as "an event created by *Make* magazine to 'celebrate arts, crafts, engineering, science projects and the Do-It-Yourself (DIY) mindset.'" The first Maker Faire was held in 2006 at the San Mateo (Calif.) County Event Center. Maker Faires have been held in other cities, and *Make* magazine assists organizations that produce Mini Maker Faires in local communities.

<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Maker_Faire>

Hackerspaces, also known as makerspaces, are defined in Wikipedia as locations where people with common interests can meet to collaborate. These spaces can be viewed as open community labs that provide machine shops, workshops, and studios where users can build and make things.

<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hackerspace>

'Is It Time to Rebuild & Retool Public Libraries and Make "TechShops"?'

Phillip Torrone, writing for the *Make* magazine blog, presents the argument that libraries should transform into places where users have access to the tools that they need to learn and make things. He believes that this is in keeping with the library's historical role of providing access to the "tools of knowledge." But now that there is easy electronic access to written materials, users need libraries to provide access to different tools that are not so readily available. He presents this argument beginning with a historical perspective, including references to Andrew Carnegie's vision of libraries, through how libraries are currently being used to what they could become.

<http://blog.makezine.com/2011/03/10/is-it-time-to-rebuild-retool-public-libraries-and-make-techshops>

'Bre Pettis Talks Libraries and Makerbots'

In this YouTube video, Bre Pettis, the co-founder and CEO of Makerbot Industries, explains why he believes Makerbots should be in libraries.

<www.youtube.com/watch?v=dBHRQ58sYLM>

'Makerspaces, Participatory Learning, and Libraries'

Buffy Hamilton, a high school librarian and teacher, writes enthusiastically about makerspaces and their value to learning on her blog, The Unquiet Librarian.

<http://theunquietlibrarian.wordpress.com/2012/06/28/makerspaces-participatory-learning-and-libraries> ■

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